

CHAPTER 202

November 15, 2011

“Oh, uh... Hello Justin-san.”

Justin had been sitting along the river bank, just kind of staring out into the rushing waters when he was interrupted from behind by one Naoto Shirogane. Why she continued to come out here to bug him, he wasn't quite sure, but he really wasn't having any of her shenanigans today. He had so much shit on his mind without Naoto somehow managing to tick him off with more of her bullshit cases and hypocritical attitude. He simply held up his finger as if to command her to be quiet as she slowly swiveled over to the seat beside him, observing him with cautious curiosity as he pressed his cell-phone up to his ear. He had been chatting on the phone when she arrived, his voice growing angrier and louder as she continued to approach him. You would think it was just because standing close to something making noise tended to make the noise appear louder; but in truth, he was just slowly stating to lose patience with the person on the other end of the line. You see Maya's illness had some rather... unappealing consequences; this being the major one.

“What do you mean you can't post-pone the test!? She is as sick as a dog; she can't even get out of bed and you want her to take a four hour long exam? It's not happening. Find another date.” Justin spoke angrily into the phone, glaring at the plastic casing as if considering just crushing the circuitry in his hands so he wouldn't have to put up with the unsufferable secretary on the other end of the line. Maya's equivalency test was supposed to be coming up within a week of today, but as the days went by, it was slowly becoming clear to Justin there was no way in hell she was going to be able to get out of bed the morning of the exam. He didn't quite understand what she meant by the pain feeling like heartbreak, but whatever it was that she meant, it didn't take a doctor to realize she was in great pain and was getting worse by the day. Justin had already called a doctor up to get his opinion on the matter, since of course Maya would not budge and go to the doctors. And it wasn't like he didn't try to force her into a hospital bed long enough for a doctor to check her condition; but he couldn't even get her out the front door with the way she kicked and moaned the whole way there. In fact, Justin had a pretty glaring black eye to show for it. He'd consider looking into a house call, but first of all he didn't even know if house calls existed anymore, and second of all, he didn't need Maya kicking the doctor in the face as he tried to do his tests.

But that was only slightly beside the point right now. Maya's illness was causing a great deal of trouble for Justin as of recent, partially because she had schedules to keep, partially because ever since Maya had moved in with Justin, they had started to split the responsibilities down the middle; and while Justin had no problem picking up the slack for her now that she was bed-ridden, there was one teensy

little, yet all too vital responsibility he had forgotten to take into consideration... Maya was probably going to tear Justin in half once she found out what he had managed to fuck up... But I mean... It wasn't like it was ever his responsibility in the first place; how was he supposed to take into account a chore that he had never done before in his life?

Again, another problem for another time, in the mean time, he had to deal with the insufferable school board and their test taking policies. You see, it appeared they had one set date for these equivalency tests and that date could not be budged under any circumstance. Which was really fucking stupid because surely they must have realized that very few people needed to take an equivalency test on a yearly basis, not to mention not everyone can be everywhere any given day of the week; and this wasn't just some concert or something. This was education that would determine where they would go for the rest of their life. This wasn't just something Maya could shrug off and take again next year: she HAD to do it, and these people were making it a living hell for her and Maya. And no matter how much Justin explained that the girl couldn't even get out of bed because she was in so much pain, the people running this test just did not give a fuck. Why was he not surprised to find people that were supposed to care about children getting a good education not giving the slightest shit about Maya now that her test fees had already been paid off? "You know what? You're despicable. You pretend to give a shit about us getting an education, but then you pull this bullshit? Go to hell." Justin growled before slamming the casing of his phone shut, disconnecting the line between him and the testing advisors. Dispicable. Disgusting to every sense of his body.

"That sounded like a rather heated conversation." Naoto muttered somewhat sarcastically to herself as Justin scowled to himself, sliding his phone back into his pocket. For a moment he had considered tossing the damn thing out into the ocean, he was THAT angry; but then he realized that would accomplish nothing more than leaving him phoneless. That wouldn't do at all. He was still pretty livid though, as much as he tried to hide it as he sunk back into his chair, folding his arms across his chest and crossing his legs as he stared back out into the river. There was something mesmerizing about the flowing water, and yet so frightening knowing that in just the right lighting, he could catch a glimpse of his other self staring at him with those twisted golden eyes, plotting to destroy him, his life, and everything he stood for. Everything he loved. Everyone he cared for. All things really; but more specifically what he loved. The shadow wanted Justin to hurt more than any other human being. And why was that? Because he hated Justin. He hated him with all his twisted black void of a heart. If the shadow could make Justin squirm and suffer, screaming for the sweet embrace of death for all eternity, not even a fraction of his hatred would be satisfied. Oh how he hated Justin. But he couldn't do a damn thing about it while Justin stood outside his domain... at least... not until he gave into his hatred. Not until he gave into the shadow's urges.

"Fucking assholes. The girl can hardly breathe and they can't even make an exception." Justin bitched and moaned about the less than pleasurable conversation he had just had with those who would be distributing the test in the week to come. He couldn't believe the audacity or greed of some people; though he could certainly expect it more often than not.

"Can't breathe? Shouldn't you be keeping an eye on Miss Jefferies if that is the case?" Naoto questioned after a moment. She didn't know a lot of the specifics since Justin seemed to be keeping a lot of the details concerning Maya's condition to himself, but she certainly would think that if Maya was in a condition where it was painful or difficult to breathe, he needed to be close by to get emergency personnel on the scene. In fact, Maya most certainly should be in a hospital in her current state, but she wasn't exactly unaware of Maya's fear of hospitals. She had of course learned this information through listening in on conversations that Yosuke and Justin had with the others, but regardless of how she obtained that information, she was in possession of knowledge that was more than relevant to the conversation at hand. It could be useful if Justin chose to actually open up and discuss the matter with her. So basically, it was probably useless. Justin immediately went to glare at Naoto, kind of pissed off that she was going to question him on the matters of Maya's well being. Justin had been doing nothing but making sure she was alright, hell he stayed up in the wee hours of the night just to keep an eye on her as she slept, just to make sure her lungs didn't suddenly fail. You could never be too sure when she continuously hyperventilated throughout the day.

"Oh well excuse me for stepping out to get some fucking air." Justin remarked with great annoyance. Since when the fuck did Naoto think she had any right to tell him what to do? He had news for her, he was trying the best he could, and maybe the best he could wasn't helping cure Maya at all, but he was trying to slow down whatever was wrong with her, and he was sure he was helping numb the pain she was going through. So Naoto could go fuck herself if she thought she could do better than what he was doing; alright? She didn't get what it was like to have to live with someone close to you suffering the way Maya was, she didn't get to tell him that what he was doing was incorrect. Besides; it wasn't like he didn't have reasons to be out there, in fact, he had a very good reason. "Besides, I uh... Had some business I had to attend to."

"Such as?" Naoto coaxed him, perhaps annoyed that he was refusing to tell her what he was doing here, perhaps just hoping to pick up the pace. Perhaps she just thought Justin was lying through his teeth. Though why exactly he would lie about something that Naoto really had no control over, she had no idea. I mean, let's be honest here: Justin didn't care what she thought of him, so there was really no motive for him to try and portray himself as this perfect, virtuous savior to his sister if he really wasn't, nor would he claim to have something to do out here if he didn't. Whatever it was, she was annoyed, and she wanted an actual answer out of Justin right now. Justin didn't so much as glare at Naoto as she questioned him though;

perhaps because there was a certain sense of guilt and sadness welling up within the deepest reaches of his stomach. It was an accident, but he knew how much it meant to Maya; sick or not. He hated to disappoint her like this, now of all times.

“...Maya had a pet turtle Donatello, and uh... with her sick and all she couldn’t really feed it, and I forgot all about him, so... uh... yeah...” Justin explained, blushing a bit with embarrassment as he turned away to try and hide his shame. He never fed the damn thing; hell he didn’t even interact with it since Maya practically had the thing in her pocket twenty four seven. He had forgotten it even existed, so you can imagine the wave of guilt, shame, shock, and disgust that swept through him when he was walking through the kitchen and laid eyes in Donatello’s tank, the poor turtle curling up on its back, dying from starvation. He couldn’t obviously just leave it there, and he couldn’t bear to tell Maya he had fucked up and killed her pet; especially not after he knew her brother had done the same thing all those years ago with Chip. Sure her brother did it on purpose and with a lot more force, but as far as Justin was concerned, what he had done was just as much murder as smashing a squirrel’s brains in. Presuming of course that’s what happened; he didn’t know for certain. So he simply made his way to the river bed where he buried the turtle’s corpse in the sand’s beneath him; hoping that at the very least if he was unlucky enough for some animal to come along and unearth the turtle, either Maya would mistake it for just some turtle that lived in this area, or said animal would carry it off to eat it. Justin sighed before turning his attention to Naoto. She seemed somewhat embarrassed to have been questioning Justin on the topic when it seemed like kind of a big deal to Maya. Sometimes you just have to let sleeping dogs lie, a lesson Naoto hadn’t quite learned yet. “Alright, now it’s my turn. What are YOU doing here?” Justin turned around anger starting to build up in him again. Naoto cleared her throat a bit as she adjusted her hat. Justin always had to make it awkward for her to talk about the thing she had shown up to discuss.

“Ah yes, well... I discussed the matter of the case with my grandfather on Benedict’s advice a few days ago. It seems that he wasn’t bluffing on the matter; my grandfather had hired him to hide my possessions in an attempt at reminding me of days gone by.” Naoto smiled slightly, closing her eyes as she thought thoroughly on the matter of her grandfather’s deception. A lie was a lie after all, but sometimes you lie to help those you care about. The same could be said about what her grandfather had pulled. And she couldn’t say he had failed to accomplish what he had set out to do... She was in fact very appreciative for her grandfather’s role in the matter... However... “I suppose that means the case should be closed and shut, but... Something’s been bothering me.” Naoto turned to face Justin, a cautious expression on her face. She knew that this was a sensitive topic and on wrong word would send Justin off the deep end again... And she wouldn’t let this case end until every loose end was tied up. Even Justin’s as much as he’d like to ignore what was right in front of his eyes. After all, the truth hurt so bad... so why tell it? “Benedict was in fact telling the truth in regards to my grandfather’s involvement, and I don’t

suspect he tell me the truth and you a lie... I do believe there is a deeper meaning behind the evidence he left behind for you; even if he was lying about your father."

Justin paused for a moment, nodding a bit in time to the rhythm of Naoto's words. He didn't believe a word Benedict spoke that day, and he probably never would, but he supposed Naoto had a point. Why would he just wrap Justin up in this if he HAD in fact been hired by Naoto's grandfather? Just as a joke? It made no sense to bring Justin in to a semi-serious case as part of some prank... Perhaps he wasn't completely full of himself after all. Even if that shit about his father was completely untrue and Justin knew it. So even though he didn't and wouldn't believe Benedict wasn't out of his mind... He'd play along and see just how deep the rabbit hole went. "And I suppose you have some master theory worked out."

"Just an idea that crossed my mind... Now this is only a theory, but... I held onto that picture you crumpled up in the music store as I felt it might be relevant... I don't know if you crumpling up the photo may have affected this at all, but I find this too strange to be a coincidence." Naoto remarked as she pulled a crinkled paper out from her jacket pocket. Justin was very clearly ticked that she held onto a personal possession of his, even if he didn't want it. Perhaps he didn't quite realize that once he leaves something behind whether it be trash or a personal memoir; if the police think it could be evidence, they have every right to take it into custody. Naoto unfolded the photo to showcase Justin and his father standing there, side by side; a hole where his father's face was. "Now you see this hole?"

"Yeah?"

"Observe." Naoto ordered before sticking her hand into her coat pocket again. This time she pulled out her police pistol, exposing it's chamber with a quick flick of her wrist and pushing one of the bullets out into the palm of her spare hand. Justin just watched with confusion, not entirely sure she was doing what she was doing at all. Little did he know that Naoto may have held the answer to Benedict's little puzzle in the palm of her hand. "I don't know if crumpling the paper tore the hole open further, but when I pressed this bullet against the hole right here..." Naoto explained as she took the bullet out from her palm and delicately pushed it into the open slot in the picture. "...It's a perfect fit. One would almost think the picture had been shot to create this hole." Justin raised his eyebrow with curiosity as he stared at the picture. That was strange, though he wasn't sure how it mattered at all in the slightest. So what, he made the hole by shooting the picture?